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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 000125

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CE (PIERANGELO, MORRIS)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/03/2019

TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#) [IS](#) [LE](#) [PL](#)

SUBJECT: POLAND'S SZCZYGLO: TROOP INCREASES FOR AFGHANISTAN  
IN DOUBT

Classified By: Ambassador Victor Ashe for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: In a February 4 meeting with the Ambassador, newly-appointed Chief of Poland's National Security Bureau, Aleksander Szczyglo said that in light of the military's increasingly dire funding picture, he no longer knew if it would be possible to add to Poland's 1,600 troops in Afghanistan. Poland will also withdraw its military contingents from the Israeli-Lebanese border and the Golan Heights, and will let its Chad mission expire in May. While the President and Prime Minister may disagree on many things, support for Missile Defense is not one of them. In public, Szczyglo has taken part in the storm of media criticism against Defense Minister Klich, on budget and other matters. Separately, in another sign of Klich's increasingly precarious position, a Foreign Ministry source told the Ambassador that Klich will not be removed before the February 19-20 informal NATO Defense Ministerial in Krakow -- hardly a ringing endorsement. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Poland's role in Afghanistan is intensifying, according to Aleksander Szczyglo, Chief of Poland's Bureau of National Security (BBN). Szczyglo, whose office is part of Lech Kaczynski's Presidential apparatus, told the Ambassador February 4 that Polish troops' past experience protecting highways in various Afghan provinces would help in the current mission of securing the highway that goes through Ghazni province to Kandahar. That road is a key transit route for mujahedin and the drug traffickers who finance their operations. Protecting highways is an important way of preserving Afghanistan's national integrity in the run-up to elections.

13. (C) Szczyglo, who served as Defense Minister under former Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski, noted that Poland's assumption of military responsibility for Ghazni in November was a major step forward. The main challenge involved in Poland's also taking over the Ghazni PRT is funding: it costs hundreds of millions of dollars annually to run a PRT. Given current defense budget problems, it may not be possible to increase Polish levels beyond the current 1,600 troops. (COMMENT: In recent weeks, Polish officials had indicated that the GoP might increase levels to 2,000 or even 2,200 troops, but projected defense expenditures have plummeted over the course of the last week. END COMMENT.)

STRAINED DEFENSE BUDGET

14. (C) The planned budget cuts announced February 4 have been higher for the Defense Ministry than any other Ministry, although not necessarily in proportion to the Ministry's overall budget, Szczyglo said. At Prime Minister Tusk's insistence, Defense Minister Klich proposed almost 2 billion PNZ (600 million USD) in defense spending cuts out of a total

budget of 25 billion PNZ. It was not clear whether these cuts are in addition to a 3 billion PNZ deficit in the 2008 military budget, a shortfall that must be paid for out of 2009 funds. Szczyglo said he has asked the Defense Ministry for details about the budget cuts, and the Defense Ministry is scheduled to brief the President today about current planning. The Polish military will end missions in Chad (that operation was due to expire in May anyway) as well as along the Israeli-Lebanese border and in the Golan Heights.

¶5. (C) Funding shortfalls will further complicate the professionalization of the military, Szczyglo said. The compensation package for volunteers is more than three times as much as for conscripts. For financial and other reasons, Szczyglo said he had called for a slower transition to an all-volunteer armed forces, along the lines of the decades-long transition that took place in the UK and Spain. Nevertheless, President Kaczynski has approved the order to end the draft. (COMMENT: This year's conscription will be Poland's last.)

MISSILE DEFENSE CONTINUES TO ENJOY SOLID SUPPORT, BUT . . .

¶6. (C) Szczyglo reaffirmed that since the signing of the August 20 Ballistic Missile Defense Agreement with the U.S., Poland's executive powers (the President and the Government) are united in supporting Missile Defense. On other security issues, he said, there is not a similar consensus. He said that surprisingly, he experienced better cooperation with the left-wing Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) governments from 2001-2005 -- particularly on European integration issues -- than with the current center-right coalition government. In

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his view, the SLD governments were knowledgeable and experienced, while the current government is prone to silly mistakes.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: Szczyglo's deputy, former Missile Defense negotiator Witold Waszczykowski, told DCM that Szczyglo was appointed in order to attack the government's foreign and defense policy. He replaces Wladyslaw Stasiak, who reportedly had little stomach for partisan polemics. Szczyglo has quickly warmed to the task, adding to a storm of media criticism that has put Klich's tenure as Defense Minister in jeopardy. A Foreign Ministry source told the Ambassador that Klich will not be removed before the February 19-20 informal Defense Ministerial in Krakow -- hardly a ringing endorsement.

ASHE